

**Filipino “Kapwa” in Global Dialogue:
A Different Politics of Being-With the “Other”**

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Abstract

Western colonial psychology has traditionally represented the Filipino ‘self’ as mainly concerned with the value of “smooth inter-personal relationship” or *pakikisama*, implying a penchant for avoiding conflict at all cost. More recent critical Filipino scholarship, however, contests such a representation as shallow and reductive, one based on a mistaken locating of the core of Filipino culture in its surface code or empirical face without regard for the deep hidden structure of meaning that often operates beneath the radar of the surveilling eye. Filipino “liberation psychology,” on the other hand, locates the sedimented core of ‘the’ Filipino self in the alternative value of *kapwa*, a “reciprocal being” between self and other secured only in give-and-take over time between the parties involved. This paper performs a historicized mapping of the discourse on *kapwa*, highlighting its implications in the realm of cultural politics and communicative interaction. Methodologically, it offers a non-essentializing construction of knowledge in intercultural communication at the same time that it calls on the academy to critically examine the ethics and politics of such knowledge construction.

Introductory Confession¹

In November 1896, Philippine anti-colonial propagandist and martyr-to-be, Jose Rizal was pulled off of a boat bound for Cuba and thrown into a Fort Santiago prison by the Spanish authorities who feared his growing national stature and the revolutionary impulses it seemed to galvanize throughout the archipelago. Though Rizal himself may have been outwardly more reformist than revolutionist in his own politics, the politics of a long-suffering people “read” him according to a different transcript (Ileto, 1979, 1998). During his trial, Rizal’s countenance itself provoked Spanish archival comment on a certain significance that certainly would not have been lost on his “folk” audience: “his look,” according to correspondent Manuel Alhama, was “hard...star[ing] at people as if to challenge them,” but also “much composed” and exhibiting “great serenity” (Ileto, 1998, 73-74). That these seemingly contradictory affects should elicit Spanish remark is the mark of the contradiction that animates this

writing. Rizal was executed December 30, 1896, still exhibiting such serene defiance—his pulse normal to the consternation of the Spanish doctor who examined him at the execution site, his body defiantly twisting as the firing squad bullets hit it so he would fall face up to the dawn and not humiliatingly sprawled in the dust (Ileto, 1979, 1998). He is now embraced in popular Filipino culture as not only “the father of the nation,” but a Tagalog Christ, complete with cult and Church and congregation (Ileto, 1979).

In 1992, Filipino overseas contract worker and martyr-to-be, Flor Contemplation, was arrested in Singapore for allegedly murdering the 3 year old son of her employer and another Filipino maid who was also present in the home at the time (Ileto, 1998). Though Contemplation represented merely one of anonymous millions of Filipino laborers forced by poverty from the homeland to face the hazards of low wage service work in frequently hostile cultures, her execution after condemnation by a Singapore court made her case a *cause celebre* on the streets of Manila and her San Pablo city-of-origin (Rafael, 1997). While the exact circumstances of the deaths remain unclear (it is quite possible Contemplation was framed), once appeals—including one by then Philippine President Ramos—had been denied by the Singapore courts, the accused indicated that she “was ready to die,” thanked everyone who had championed her cause, and calmed and comforted her own children. Rather than scramble after each thread of new hope that could lead to new disappointment, Contemplation reached a point after two years on death row of facing her “fate” with equanimity. Her execution provoked a national debate on migrant worker rights and government responsibility that continues into the present.

There is much in these two moments of martyr-making that could be pursued with scholarly profit. But the interest that energizes the inquiry here is galvanized by the serene surface of these two sufferers of scapegoating that harbored an interior “hard” with other potencies and meanings. It is this relationship between surface and subtext that fascinates. In a word, this writing will focus on the core Filipino value of *kapwa*—an indigenous conception of “reciprocal being” between self and other that met with no little confusion in colonial encounters with the Western paradigm that located being in individual cogitation (Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum*) and finds no easy resolution in today’s struggles between Philippine national interests and neo-liberal globalizing forces. In the event of such unresolved wrestling, the desultory death-row demeanors of Rizal and Contemplation demand an accounting that cannot but implicate the accuser. *Kapwa* demands its due first of all in the subject of inquiry.

I am a white male, mid west bred, inner-city Detroit educated, activist-scholar, enough initiated in the anguish of urban Americana-of-color after 20 years of living there to bring deep suspicion to the table of questions in the white-dominated academy. My questions are those of the paper: how interpret

oneself in the encounter with the Other; how interpret the Other in the encounter with oneself? While such queries are nearly soporific in the academic colloquies of our day, the actual encounter with communication-presuppositions in everyday life where love and war are at stake is a different matter. For me personally, the significance of this discussion has consequences for both romantic intimacy and political hegemony. My interlocutor is both consort and other: my partner of choice and my post-colonial “prey.”

There is no masking such a contradiction—though Western academic fictions of neutrality and objectivity would seek to silence such observations as extraneous. It is precisely this aporetic space of modern encounter—a dreamed parity deformed by a scheme of rapacity—that poses the problematic. In *nuce*, in the effort pursued here, 16th century Filipino *kapwa* could be said to have met Spanish *Catholica*, and later the American drive to civilize and commoditize and revise everything into a version of itself, and locked into a struggle that remains resonant today. On one side is an intention and expectation of mutuality; on the other, the model of a mutual company that is anything but mutual. My own theorizing is an on-going elaboration of asymptotic discourse in that zone of struggle that has as one of its ultimate goals the undoing of my own identity as white, male and Western. The tack is tricky, but thus is the world today—the world over. There is no easy passage... for anyone.

The Problematic at a Glance

Kapwa, according to my partner-scholar Lily Mendoza, in her groundbreaking work of translation *Between the Homeland and the Diaspora*, is the central value of Filipino culture (Mendoza, 2002). It is (mis-)read on the surface by Spanish and American conquerors alike (the one in guise of religious deliverer from pagan damnation, the other of pedagogical emancipator from darkness) as “weakness,” an obsequious propensity to avoid conflict at all costs (Mendoza, 2002). The charge from colonial master to prostrate subject is popularized in the form of a pun: the posture that ever acknowledges the dominating other as almighty “sir.” In the parlors of the powerful the code is decoded in a laugh: “Pilipinos prefer ‘smooth interpersonal relations’ even at the cost of blistered knees and rammed rears. So we will give it to them.” The perception becomes codified in colonial parlance as the “SIR syndrome” (Mendoza, 2002).

At the point of a gun, surrounded by dead bodies (uncounted in the three-and-a-half centuries of Iberian rule; more than half a million in the decade 1898-1908 of the Filipino-American War alone), it is likely the living will resort to outward compliance to mask inward resistance—as folk have done around the world, in inveterately illimitable permutations of cultural insurgence since

domination ever first appeared, scowling and belligerent, from the womb of violent take-over. The question is, what actually obtains under the surface of seeming conformance? Here is the very stuff of my own dilemma, as one positioned in dominance whether I will it or not: how read the communication of those, including my beloved, who, in the global structure of things and ideas, suffer my privilege, when I know some of the code of their communication is necessarily structured as a hidden contestation? (Perkinson, 2002).

Methodologically, the recourse chosen for this writing is that of Yale social scientist James Scott, especially as articulated in his work, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. Scott offers there the twin notions of transcripts public and private, giving form and substance to the relations between power and its sufferers, structuring consciousness on either side of the divide into a constant game of dissimulation and pressure, feeling out vulnerabilities, posturing for relative favor while probing for relative power. Of course those who steal the goods to hire the guns to force their way ultimately have the upper hand, but within a jointly maintained space of public transaction, the subordinate can indeed inflict costs and conspire plans that go tangent to the dominating tactic. Scott's contribution was to have conjured, inside the supposed "false consciousness" of the pilloried and the plundered, a greater degree of agency and calculation than can be detected on the topside of the structure of control. The histories—and indeed historiographies—that come to be written are inevitably those of the winners, whose gathering of surplus plunder from the labor of the conquered leverages the leisure of those doing the writing (including those of us who both read and write essays like this). But underneath that "official version" of events, in the very place of the text that seems to describe the texture of social relations, inside the very language used to legitimize the obligations--gerrymandering the meanings seemingly convened by the words of the elite scribes--is a whole underworld of incipient revolts and rebellions, of poached properties and proliferating puns, of work slowdowns and sped-up rumors, of ribaldry enjoyed at the expense of dominating decorum and of rancor delivered by way of indirection to the very face of the master, who with respect to *that* code remains inevitably illiterate.

But in thus offering such an underpinning of theory from the halls of ivy, I risk recapitulating the very thing I seek to help undo. In the Philippines itself (as we shall see in more detail below), there exists today a whole body of theory that has germinated since the mid-20th century, that carries out the kind of program Scott only more lately stumbled upon, that gains momentum as an incipient academic movement in the 1970s, finds purchase in the public domain in the vaunted People Power I ousting of dictator Marcos and his crew in 1986, pushes for the adoption of indigenous Tagalog as national discourse in school and media alike, and, even while now having to struggle against revisionist

backlash and neo-liberal knee-bending to US pretension to rule the globe, continues to forge a re-invention of indigenous culture and communication from the depths of the popular labyrinth of imagination (Mendoza, 2002). Known by the nomenclature of “indigenization,” the movement has re-framed such dismissive colonial and post-colonial readings of native notions like *kapwa* as indicated above, opening underneath that wise surface of seeming capitulation to the dominator, multiple layers of “other” meanings and merits, memories and potencies, that bide their time, until a possibility for eruption emerges. That seemingly naive and obsequious “servant-folk” could erupt in revolutionary defeat of Spain such as the end of the 19th century witnessed, could resist American technology and weaponry in the name of republic vision and peasant wisdom for more than a decade after bloody imposition of US decision-making, could marshal a million in the streets against the militia of Marcos more recently, and re-visit such mobilizations when threatened by a certain kind of plundering under Joseph Estrada in 2001, belies the easy reading of “smooth-seeking-slavishness” that domination has wanted to believe. Rather we are presented with an indigenous production of codes that run deep beneath the surface of public postures and political pressures.

The problematic such a recognition opens can perhaps be apostrophized as a public performance of contestation as a cultural form. It is hard to find appropriate language for the intuition here. To the degree that pre-contact Filipino culture embodied a core value of *kapwa*, itself multi-layered and secured only in give-and-take over time between the parties involved, Western incursion would have to be imagined as probed and partially embraced by Philippine communities in a dialectical dance seeking to establish *kapwa* with the newcomers. When “reciprocated” only with violent subordination and rapacious exploitation, the value was driven underground, but not simply either erased or contained in Spanish Catholic rule and ritual. It remains a real question of history today to what degree indigenous practice “ate” Roman performance, adopting, under necessity, “Christian” parlance and processional forms, but loading into the language of body and bearing, a whole set of native understanding and intentions (Ileto, 1979). Thus holy week festivities appeared to friar-auditors to conform to Catholic protocol and served as platforms for elite Filipino (*ilustrado*) power-brokers to demonstrate their embrace of Western values and lace (Ileto, 1998). But the peasant masses were prosecuting a whole different set of meanings and desires under the surface of those enculturated forms (Ileto, 1998). Thus smooth-seeking-face-saving that appears so slavish to Iberians and elites alike actually harbors a wholly “other” meaning for the underside (Mendoza, 2002). Constant, in colonial archival reports of executions of peasant leaders of the 19th century *Confradia* and *Katipunan* groups resisting Spanish rule was their meeting of death with equanimity (Ileto, 1979).

Constant, in folk memory of those epical events, is the equation of such serenity in the midst of struggle with a strong *loob* or inner self, product of the practice of *kapwa*-reciprocity with one's community and its surrounding ecology (mountains for instance are understood as potent sources of the power that concentrates in a *loob* in right relation to its environment) (Ileto, 1979).

Constant also, we might say with historiographic hindsight, however, is the connection of such serenity with its capacity for what seems to be the opposite: the eruption of anger that sustains a revolution for independence for more than a decade after US occupation in the early part of the century or that is played out in inscrutable measures in a life-long self-exile in the nether-world of overseas labor to sustain an impoverished family, such as we witness at the other end of the century. Whether in a Rizal writing for recovery of the historical memory of the culture or a Contemplation simply working to survive, the relation between apparent opposites is the same. The *kapwa* in question here, the smooth-surface relations that seem to the colonizers and their post-modern successors to be the sole orientation of the indigenous cultures is not a mask for some other energy such as fury: the *smooth-work is itself the fury*, in quest of a community that is sustainable and reciprocal. Under the duress of revolutionary resistance, *kapwa* expressed its power as heroic effort even when the outcome appeared tragic. In post-colonial frame, it appears heroic inside the individualizing domain of the Western strain to absolutize gain. But who is actually winning the struggle between such an individualizing conscription and a communalizing reciprocation remains unclear. The differently-oriented relational impulses remain locked in titanic struggle inside Filipino culture.

Intermediate Confession

At stake in this wrestling over codes, meanings, and re-interpretations of culture and history is a critical question reaching to the heart of what I deem, in my own work, to comprise intercultural communication--the disciplinary context for this particular discourse on insider claims to "indigenous" knowledge. And since my partner-scholar here has seen fit to declare his personal positioning and identity (and given that I am about to discourse on the *kapwa* ethic of mutuality and reciprocity) it seems only fair that I return the gesture.

I am a Filipina, born and raised in a small barrio in what was once the Great Central Plains of Luzon, formerly known as "the rice granary of the Philippines," that is, before export-led economic liberalization along with the Third World ravages of globalization all but devastated the region's productive capacity (ironically today, the nation, formerly self-sufficient in this staple commodity, is starkly dependent on rice imports from its neighboring Southeast Asian "betters"). I came to the US in August of 1995, ostensibly to pursue my

doctorate in intercultural communication, but more realistically, under duress—to escape a personal situation that necessitated temporary relocation for my psychological health. I say “under duress” because my leaving came at a most inopportune time when I had just begun to undergo my most radical cultural awakening (of which I will say more in a minute).

Raised Methodist Protestant in a predominantly Roman Catholic neighborhood, my family, in many ways, was atypical. Where the majority of Filipinos’ subjection to US influence was secured mostly through the instrumentality of a colonial system of education, my family had the added efficacy of indoctrination into North American culture, thanks to the faithful ministrations of the American Protestant missionaries.² I, for one, was a dutiful colonial subject, internalizing the ethic of individualism, self-reliance and direct (i.e., honest) expression that we were taught, growing up, marked the psychologically mature Christian individual when we were. In school, I was forced to speak English and lapsed into my native Pampango tongue only at the risk of being fined five-centavos for every violation. The upshot was that I learned to think, speak, and view the world from an other’s eye, believing it was for my own good to unlearn my “primitive ways” and thereby gain entry into the ranks of the fully human, of whom the white man, his culture, his civilization and his (supposed) independence were the epitome.

Yet the treachery was that independence, much less, self-reliance, was something colonialism precisely would not--could not—afford to allow non-white skinned Filipino natives. As Frantz Fanon (1963) put it, colonialism’s task is ever to constitute the self as “other,” thereby disallowing it from ever assuming its necessary role as self. Part of colonialism’s project then is to discredit the native’s way of being. In the Philippine experience, this took a variety of forms, in the calculation of liberation psychologist Virgilio Enriquez (1994): through the repression of indigenous lifeways and expression; the denigration and marginalization of the Filipino self, identity, values, artistic expression and appearance; the destruction and desecration of cultural artifacts; and, where colonial co-optation was deemed effective, the re-definition and token utilization of indigenous cultural elements within the prevailing colonial ideology as a substitute for genuine recognition of the natives’ humanity. For decades to come, Filipino “culture” and “identity” in U.S. colonial discourse was thus constructively homo-genized in terms of a constellation of traits. As I note in an earlier volume:

These traits revolved around certain surface values that had mostly to do with preserving “face” or what has been labeled the “SIR syndrome” [as mentioned above] (i.e., the penchant for “smooth interpersonal relationships”). Identified as its concomitant trilogy of values are *utang na loob* (roughly, debt of gratitude), *pakikisama* (getting along), and

hiya (shame). Accompanying this trilogy of values is a set of loose negative trait attributions: the habit of *ma-nana* (chronic procrastination), *ningas cogon* (good starters, poor finishers, like the short blaze of cogon grass), *bahala na* (fatalism) and *talangka* mentality (“crab mentality,” i.e., the tendency to pull down those who strive to be better). For decades, such identity constructs were generally accepted and used in textbooks to teach Filipinos about themselves. (Mendoza, 2002, p. 57)

Indeed, for much of my growing up years, it is cultural readings such as this that informed my own self-formation, provoking, expectedly, a logical, albeit unconscious, obsession to escape the degraded being I had become in my own eyes and become a bonafide ‘little brown American.’ And yet in spite of the dutiful performance of an Americanized identity reinforced by on-going encounter with the relentless pedagogies of US Peace Corps Volunteers and missionaries (who continued to come long after the US “granting” of formal independence to its Philippine colony on July 4, 1946), a part of my psyche stubbornly refused conversion. Manifesting itself as an acute form of self-rejection and individualized pathology, in the end, such stubborn incapacity to assimilate (sometimes appearing in the form of a persistently painful wrestling with spoken English despite having been forced to speak it all my life, and more generally, a feeling of “dis-ease” or simply, the inability to function easily within the imposed colonial cultural norm) proved to be my salvation.

My “deliverance” came in 1982 while in a graduate seminar in the humanities entitled, “Image of the Filipino in the Arts” taught by a Filipino arts and musicology professor known for his prodigious first-hand research in the surviving indigenous arts of the country’s estimated 80 or so ethnolinguistic communities. I provide a description of that fateful moment of my cultural awakening in the Prologue of an earlier work, thus:

Here [in this graduate course], I learned for the first time about “the” Filipino “indigenous” consciousness and sensibility through the use of art as a projective tool . . . Suddenly, something very powerful ignited in the depths of my being. For the first time, I gained a recognition of a self separate from the self that was always wanting to be other than itself (Fanon and Jung would later complete the inner work for me), like a self recognizing itself for the first time, or like looking into a mirror and finding not a degraded creature staring back but someone human. I was like a fool, bawling my heart out as I walked out of every class session, not knowing what it was that hit me from all the innocent aesthetic descriptions of the indigenous communities’ art forms and what they expressed in terms of a different way of being.

Now I know that that different way of being [as embodied in the various indigenous arts] was the way of being I had always instinctively shared but had repressed; hence, the intense internal contradiction. For the first time, here was an entire people I felt I could belong to and identify with, a legitimate human community not necessarily degraded because different (different from the invisible White colonial norm). Thus began my initiation into the indigenization movement in the academy. (Mendoza, 2002, pp. xvi-xvii)

This place, this space of self-reclamation, is what I claim as my location in this conversation. In a way, the epiphany of that moment for me consisted in the realization that the act of “reading” cultures, far from being an innocent exercise in objective science, is, on the contrary, a highly political act fraught with all kinds of implications. Indeed, within the colonial experience, it often spells the difference between life and death not least of all for those forced to undergo the violence of epistemic erasure and the subsequent supplantation of their ways of being with an alien(ating) ideology.

The Problematic in Detail

The Task of Cultural Recuperation

The task of re-reading, then, confronts not only the cultural outsider seeking initiation into the indigenous code but, as well, the cultural insider whose unwitting collusion in her own subjection has come surreptitiously by way of acquiescence to the view from the outside--what postcolonial parlance calls the internalized “colonial gaze.” And yet as we have posited at the beginning of this essay, there is something complex at work even in this phenomenon of seemingly unconditional surrender to dominant ideology: perceptions of total capitulation--arising from the observed Filipino penchant for “smooth interpersonal relationships,” as mentioned earlier--in the end, might possibly, in and of themselves, encode different meanings for those able to discern and access the hidden transcript beneath the public performance of self-effacing obsequiousness. What is offered here then is an alternative reading of the surface code, a project entailing, as it were, a profoundly complex excavation work. While certain post-colonial articulations cannot but find misguided--if not outright impossible and illusory—any such attempts at “exhumation,” “recuperation,” or “recovery” of presumably submerged meanings under the debris of colonial wreckage, we wish here to argue that not to attempt such excavation is merely to leave intact the system of oppression and domination so adroitly normalized in the colonial order. Hence, a critical interrogation of such normalized understandings is not only desirable but imperative for those whose vision it is to work for more just intercultural relations.

The contention here has to do with competing frameworks of interpretation all claiming to account for Filipino patterns of cultural communication. Given that individual codes come in systems and assume meaning only within the signifying system to which they belong, the argument being made is for a way to apprehend not merely the discrete behavioral manifestations of any given culture but the whole system of signification that Hall (1997) refers to as a culture's "framework of intelligibility" that serves as the defining context of those behaviors. Without such, there can only be mis-reading and a consequent failure to arrive at more adequate cultural interpretations.

Historically, the framework most employed by colonial scholarship in the Philippines comes from positivist social science whose characteristic mark is its primary reliance on a culture's given empirical face. The constellation of traits built around the presumed SIR syndrome of Filipinos is a classic example of this kind of unproblematic reading of surface cultural manifestations. Presumed to be nothing more than an objective account of observed cultural phenomena unmediated by subjective interpretation of the onlooker, such "description" nonetheless is far from innocent in the way that all organizing schemas, according to anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966), are always already inscribed in a certain form of politics that invariably serves a given bias or interest. In the case of the identified SIR syndrome in Filipino culture, going unmarked in the analysis is a Western framework of intelligibility operating as the invisible norm against which comparative evaluations of the object of analysis (i.e., Filipino culture) are then made. For example, where the normative value is assertion of individual rights and the aggressive pursuit of self-interest without regard for group or societal considerations, a constant concern for social relations and group maintenance appears not only a trivial pursuit but outright counter-productive. Little wonder then that the concomitant traits accompanying the so-called SIR syndrome as the presumed "core" of Filipino values all take a negative valence (i.e., "conflict avoidance," "shame," "getting along," "procrastination," "lack of determination," "fatalism," etc.) thereby reducing the native culture to an implied passivity and, by implication, disqualifying it from ever coming up to the Western ideal of "progressive (i.e., capitalist) development."³ From this, it doesn't take much to discern the implication of such an analytical trajectory for continued colonial administration and tutelage. Tragically, to this day, unsuspecting neo-colonial elites in the Philippine government continue to buy into this myth of a "counter-productive culture" even as the question is repeatedly, persistently posed in policy decision-making, "What is really wrong with us?" (cf. Licuanan, et. al., 1988; Maggay, 1993), by implication faulting the indigenous culture rather than the savage violence of more than four centuries of protracted colonial and neo-colonial domination whose concomitant distortions and interminable aftermath⁴ continue to wreak

havoc even in the postcolonial present.

The Politics of “Indigenous” Interpretation

A challenge that has emerged within the last three decades or so to this objectivist paradigm but which has yet to make the rounds of the international circuit of scholarship is the perspective coming from *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Filipino psychology)--a strand in a movement working for the indigenization of the disciplines in the Philippine academy.⁵ Also known as *sikolohiyang mapagpalaya* or “liberation psychology,” the movement began with the project of deconstructing American psychology as, in effect, only one ethnic psychology among many, albeit masquerading as a universal, autonomous psychology. In reaction to the universalizing pretensions of American psychology that negatively framed difference in the native culture, *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* necessarily was forced to construct a profile of Filipino culture and personality responding to the negative colonial ascriptions by assigning a positive valence to the list of negative traits and alleged core values attributed to Filipinos. Thus, for example,

[B]ahala na (fatalism) was reinterpreted as “determination and risk-taking,” “a way of pumping courage into [one's] system so that [one does] not buckle down” in the face of formidable obstacles (Pe-Pua 1991). *Talangka* or crab mentality became a call for community members to acknowledge indebtedness to others and to work for the good of the entire community and not just for themselves (cf. Jocano 1966). (in Mendoza, 2001, p. 233)

Likewise, to the twin charge of the habit of *manana* (procrastination) and *ningas cogon* (tendency to leave tasks unfinished despite initial enthusiasm--akin to the short blaze of cogon grass), the question is raised: Are these really indications of the Filipinos' poor work ethic and lack of ability to delay gratification, or are they rather an “indigenous instinct for time as an event, or occasion,...a do[ing of] things as they come, as they present themselves in season, and not because the timepiece says so?” (Maggay, 1993, p. 11). And yet, while such reinterpretations succeeded in lending a more positive trajectory to the profile of Filipino culture and identity in the scholarly literature, the effect was merely that of reverse stereotyping, i.e., the turning of negative stereotypes into positive ones but still failing to dismantle the old colonial framework that remained intact in the way its categories continued to serve as the defining framework for analysis.

The Communication of *Kapwa* as Core Value

With the advancement of critical theorizing in the humanities and social science disciplines, but particularly within the discipline of psychology, a new

paradigm emerged, this time rejecting the old colonial framework entirely and critiquing the very premises and assumptions of a universalist, transcultural social science. Departing from the earlier tendency merely to react to colonial allegations, scholars coming from various disciplines, but particularly from critical psychology, converged around the consensus that an entirely different concept, i.e., *kapwa*, is constitutive of the organizing principle in the various Filipino cultures.⁶ *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* pioneer Enriquez clarifies:

Filipino-English dictionaries generally give the words “both” and “fellow-being” as translations of *kapwa* (Panganiban 1972, Enriquez 1979, de Guzman 1968, Calderon 1957). It should be noted, however, that when asked for the closest English equivalent of *kapwa*, one word that comes to mind is the English word “others.” However, the Filipino word *kapwa* is very different from the English word “others.” In Filipino, *kapwa* is the unity of the “self” and “others.” The English “others” is actually used in opposition to the “self,” and implies the recognition of the self as a separate identity. In contrast, *kapwa* is a recognition of shared identity, an inner self shared with others (Enriquez, 1992, p. 43).

As warrant, he offers the following evidence:

One argument for the greater importance of *kapwa* in Filipino thought and behavior is the shock or disbelief that the Filipino registers when confronted with one who is supposedly *walang kapwa* (-tao) [no sense of *kapwa*]. If one is *walang pakisama* [having no ability to get along], others might still say, “He would eventually learn” or “Let him be; that’s his prerogative.” If one is *walang hiya* [no shame], others say, “His parents should teach him a thing or two.” If one is *walang utang na loob* [no debt of gratitude] others might advise, “Avoid him.” But if one is *walang kapwa tao* [no sense of *kapwa*], people say, “He must have reached rock bottom. *Napakasama na niya*. He is the worst.” (Enriquez, 1992, p. 61).

To regard others in the normative mode of *kapwa* then is to treat them as an integral part of the self. Filipino psychologist Jaime Bulatao (1992) draws an analogy explaining the differing logic governing the sense of self among Filipinos as compared to (typical mainstream North) Americans. Filipinos, he notes, may be compared to “so many fried eggs in a pan whose experience of the self consists of a ‘core’ (the yolk) but with the outer core (the egg white) blurring into/with the outer core of other eggs in a coterminous fashion.” On the other hand, he likens mainstream North Americans to “so many hard-boiled eggs whose individual shells protect their autonomy and who then exercise the option to either open themselves (or part of themselves) to others or not at all” (in Mendoza, 2003).

This differing sense of being among Filipinos consequently gives rise to a reconfiguration of Filipino culture that is able to recover the hidden code governing Filipino cultural communication patterns. For one, in contrast to previous models that stressed the maintenance of surface harmony as core value, *kapwa*, once adopted as the new interpretive principle, generates an entirely different set of associated values that have nothing at all to do with the surface values identified with the complex of SIR. These accompanying values to *kapwa* are: *karangalan* (dignity), *katarungan* (justice), and *kalayaan* (freedom). Together, they constitute Filipino subjectivity in *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*.

Within the schema of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*, the core value of *kapwa* (shared being or identity) along with its associated values of dignity, justice and freedom, are what constitutes the deep structure of the cultures of Filipinos. On the other hand, the SIR complex of “social acceptance,” “social equity” (as in *utang na loob* or debt of gratitude) and “social mobility” (crab mentality) are deemed merely the reductionist/functionalist mis-interpretations of surface codes without regard for their deeper, underlying dynamic (Enriquez, 1992, p. 75). Absolutely necessary then in deciphering communicative meaning in such a cultural context (in every way a high context one) is the skill of what is called *pakiramdam* (the capacity to feel for another) which is seen as a pre-requisite to *pakikipagkapwa-tao* (a way of being human with another). Here, Filipino communication scholar Melba Maggay, in her book, *Pahiwatig: Kagawiang Pangkomunikasyon ng Filipino* (2002) describes the whole complex of subtle, elaborate indirect communication found in all Filipino cultures. Termed *pahiwatig* (sensing, feeling out), she characterizes it as a type of intricate, unscripted, improvisational dance of meaning-exchange without words, or rather in spite of the use of words. It is a communicative resource that allows Filipinos to be “comfortable with unstructured, indefinite, and unpredictable situations” (Mataragnon in Enriquez, 1992, p. 62). Without this element of subtle (non-verbal and/or para-linguistic) communication of being-to-being, *kapwa* in all its manifestations becomes inoperative since it ceases to have a means of expression or communication.

Kapwa, however, presupposes a mutuality of being most intimately encoded in the Filipino pronoun (non-existent in English), *kita* (you and me taken together as one). To violate the principle of mutuality, and by implication, reciprocity in one’s relationship with one’s fellow human being is to place oneself outside the relational context of *kapwa* and to act as an “other” separate from one’s fellow human being, i.e., as one lacking in *pakikipagkapagkapwa-tao* (one who doesn’t know how to be a human being with another). A potential response to such especially when the violation is committed by someone from a powerful position is a form of inscrutable silence on the part of the subordinate. Often mistaken for acquiescence or unthinking surrender or accommodation, it

is in fact none of the three, as Maggay (2002) notes:

Silent, lacking in power, and lowly in demeanor, these inert masses are forced to resort to force in order to defend themselves and others downtrodden like them in the face of injustice. Speechless, they are often mistaken for being dumb and never expected capable of acting on matters of the public good. (pp. 96-97; translation from Filipino original ours)

Final Confession

Inevitably, reconstructions of past values for the sake of present vitalities always run the risk of romanticization (Alejo, 2000). The thinking concerning *kapwa* offered here is no exception. The issue in our minds, however, is not question of no romanticism, but which romanticism? (Alejo, 2000). Whose magnification? In part we would wish to argue for a certain kind of romance as necessary to human hope and to careful communication. “Words” themselves are already “romantic” in the sense that they are mere markings on a page, soundings in the air, that seek to change worlds, win hearts, reshape minds. Little signs with big pretensions! Magnifications of minute facets of reality for the purpose of extending or changing the status quo (Alejo, 2000). The (very real) dangers of romanticism are best met not with an aim at some pristine formulation of bloodless balance, but passionate challenge of the reigning romance. “Science,” “objectivity,” “academic theory,” “empirical inquiry”—these strike us as the great dangerous romance of our time, enshrined in Western economic institutions, backed up by military initiatives, that brook no serious challenge even while they quite demonstrably mask their real operation as on-going plunder of indigenous peoples and resources world-wide. In one sense, this paper proposes a battle of romances indigenous and modern for the sake of pulling back the curtain on the old man manipulating the megaphone.

And thus having traversed a small way across a heretofore hidden terrain of culture, the question should be emerging, “Why do so? Why would a culture ravaged by Western powers and globalizing forces, seek partially to unmask its codified depths for the perusal of the (Western) academy?” It is not a new question of the politics of intercultural translation. But it is not a question by any means yet *passee*, either. There is no easy route forward in this labyrinth of hermeneusis.

What Filipino *kapwa* gives us, in postcolonial permutation, is a complex codification of an on-going struggle, a mortal combat visited by the West on the rest of the globe for some five centuries now that continues to resist both political negotiation and verbal comprehension. Cultural indigeneity has had to go underground to survive, has layered masks over the tasks of meaning-making,

to keep the Western eye of rationality from raiding and raping the richness. But at cost. Native speakers of indigenous languages are faced with the penetration of those languages by an economy of meaning and a meaning of economy that rifles their resources in service of an ethic of accumulation answerable to no community and beholden to no law that it cannot unmake or break. *Kapwa* is a clear instance of a core value of a non-Western people locked inside its own culture in titanic struggle with an invasive counter-value that does not submit readily to its own ethic of reciprocity. The result is a vortex of relentless individualism and resistant communalism, the former pulling mutuality towards its deformation in thrall to the one while the latter does end-runs continuously on the design, circling the self back into its others. But it is not a struggle of equals. And thus the hidden-ness of the transcript is not a problem to be solved, but a condition to be respected.

The surface perception of Filipino culture as smooth-seeking and serenity-entreaty, in this particular case, is not merely Western mis-reading, but also protective Filipino mis-leading, safe-guarding a secret strength that offers its code only to a particular mode of participation. The code is not to be broken! It is to be undergone. A clear choice for its clairvoyant value is the condition *sine qua non* for entry into its meaning. That value is a comprehensive meaning of the reciprocal. Taken seriously in the present circumstance of the global metabolism of things and peoples, the value could only mean a re-circulation of Western-controlled resources back through Third World concourses that would reduce the average middle class lifestyle around the globe by some huge percentage. Anything less than anticipation of such a radical reciprocation—while pretending to want to “understand the culture of *kapwa*”—is more of the same of Western trickery. We dare say most of us in this room—certainly ourselves included, perhaps even extending to others of us who might claim Filipino blood—are not quite ready to learn that kind of *kapwa*. We prefer to romanticize the face of Rizal or cry in grief for Contemplation rather than reverse the situation that their serene death-mask both belies and decries.

Notes

1. “Confession” is the chosen term for this and two subsequent subsections in reference not only to the authors’ offering of some autobiographical material as part of the writing, but also to the recounting of the martyr-like executions of Jose Rizal and Flor Contemplation with which the piece opens. A martyr in early Christianity was considered the “witness” *par excellence*, offering bodily “confession” of a politico-religious conviction that valued a certain kind of justice above life itself.

2. Whom Constantino (1977) would later label, along with the Peace Corps Volunteers and civilian administrators sent over to administer the islands, as the US's "second army of occupation". It is the arrival of this second ideological battalion that would complete the work of pacification where military containment alone had failed to secure subject compliance.
3. Not to argue that such ideal is recognized as a desirable one; on the contrary, part of indigenization's critique is the uncritical acceptance of modern capitalist development as the necessary ideal for all.
4. In the words of anthropologist, Mary Louise Pratt (1994), "Under conquest social and cultural formations enter long-term, often permanent states of crisis that cannot be resolved by either conqueror or conquered" (p. 26).
5. For a full discussion of this movement, see Mendoza (2002).
6. Note the emergence here of the plural "cultures," versus the homogenizing effect of the reactive anti-colonial discourse that necessarily dichotomized between "foreign" and "indigenous" conceptualizations. The plural "cultures" signifies the plurality, albeit with close interrelatedness, among the various Philippine ethnolinguistic communities once the discursive context changes from having to address the nation's colonial interlocutor to one taking place within the closed community of Filipinos addressing and speaking with each other (an entire tradition of theoretical practice was later on built around this contextual difference in speaking contexts called *Pantayong Pananaw* (a "for-us from-us" perspective) (cf. Mendoza, 2002).

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